

**E**lectric and natural gas utility companies across the county are struggling to fill skilled technical and craft positions. The need is likely to continue for the immediate future. In fact, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the demand for entry-level line workers, powerplant operators, pipe fitters, and other positions that require technical knowledge is expected to grow by 9 percent annually. By 2010, the industry will need to add 10,000 new skilled workers each year as baby-boomers begin retiring in record numbers.

A 2005 craft skills gap survey conducted by the Utility Workforce Planning Network identified four areas where utilities face the greatest hiring needs over the next four years and beyond: maintenance and repair workers, electrical power line installers and repairers, first-line supervisors and managers, and powerplant operators.

Companies that responded to the survey also indicated that current applicants frequently lack the skills necessary to fill those employment needs. More than half the companies said that prospective employees showed deficiencies in technical knowledge, mathematical ability, and communications skills.

But utilities are all at different places in terms of recruiting workers and filling jobs. There are both short- and longer-term needs. Some companies already face shortages in skilled and craft jobs and need more immediate help in filling the worker pipeline. Others have a few years before the shortage will become critical.

The same is true of the future workforce. Some are looking for a job now, and others are not even aware of the opportunities that a career in the utility industry can bring.

How can utility companies bridge those gaps and provide the specific technical skills to help new employees jump-start their careers? It starts with partnerships among utility companies, other industries, and the education system. That's where the new Center for Energy Workforce Development (CEWD) comes in.

## BUILDING THE SKILLS OF A NEW WORKFORCE

*By Mary Miller,  
vice president of human resources  
at Edison Electric Institute.*

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### Building Worker Interest and Skills

CEWD, a self-sustaining educational initiative, draws on partnerships with Edison Electric Institute, American Gas Association, Nuclear Energy Institute, and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

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With the help of the partner organizations and their members, we're creating a clearinghouse for that information. Think about it in terms of what the prospective employee might ask: "What kinds of jobs are available? What kind of education and training do I need? Where can I get a good job?"

The result will be a menu of industry solutions focused on the four linked components of workforce development: career planning, training, certification, and job placement.

### A Team Effort

Once workforce models and resources are developed, CEWD will form regional development teams of utilities, workforce development agencies, and educational institutions to apply solutions in a given geographic region. Working at a regional level allows the teams to manage differences in economic conditions, demographics, and utility needs.

This type of regional model has already proven effective in producing workers with the skill sets utilities demand. A good example is the three-state, entry-level craft worker education and training project with American Electric Power, Zane State College (OH), West Virginia State Community College and Technical Institute, and Ashland Community Technical College (KY).

CEWD will study such successful partnerships, identify what makes them effective, and share the models across the industry via its online clearinghouse.

A number of other initiatives are already in the works. For example, through partnerships with educational experts and industry-based advisory councils, CEWD plans to identify model curricula and best practices in education for secondary schools and community colleges. To raise awareness about electric and gas utilities as a preferred career choice, CEWD will launch a communication campaign—"Get Into Energy"—through a variety of media. This will include an interactive website offering educational content, utility career stories, information on required skills and education, and links to community college and company recruiting sites.

"Increasing the number of graduates and training programs to fill critical skilled and craft jobs is essential for both electric and natural gas utilities," says Paul Bowers, president of Southern Company Generation and CEWD's chairman.

With CEWD, we're doing that in a way that benefits all participants. For more information on the program and to help make it a centerpiece for this industry's workforce development, contact me at [mmiller@eei.org](mailto:mmiller@eei.org). ♦